

## APPENDIX E: AFRICAN-AMERICAN WORKSHOPS

### INTRODUCTION

Beginning in December 1996 the National Park Service held several meetings with representatives of African-American communities, organizations, and educational institutions to begin a dialogue to meet the intent of section 1104 of the Delta Initiatives legislation. Section 1104 is summarized below:

Prepare a plan within three years after funds are made available that establishes a Delta Region African-American heritage corridor and cultural center; and a music heritage program with specific emphasis on the Delta blues. This plan would also propose a network of heritage sites, structures, small museums, and festivals in the Delta region.

In August 1995, Jean Lafitte National Historic Park and Preserve sponsored an African-American Heritage Workshop in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. It was the first heritage workshop held as part of the National Park Service's response to the Delta Initiatives legislation. Over 100 individuals representing various interests in both the seven-state Delta Region and the nation attended the workshop. The 2 1/2-day workshop looked at heritage tourism on a combined seven-state basis.

In December 1996, 27 people attended a one-day meeting in Alexandria, Louisiana, to talk about African-American heritage in Louisiana. Many of the attendees at this meeting had participated in the heritage workshop in Baton Rouge the year before.

Attendees at the Alexandria workshop discussed information that is readily available related to African-American history and heritage in Louisiana as well as sites and resources across the state that are visitor ready or under development as possible tourism sites.

In March 1997 the National Park Service contracted with Ms. Scinthya Edwards, former director of the Delta Cultural Center in Helena, Arkansas, to conduct a series of workshops in Arkansas, Mississippi (2), and Tennessee. During March and April meetings were held in Forrest City, Arkansas; Yazoo City and Jackson, Mississippi; and Memphis, Tennessee. National Park Service personnel gave attendees information on why the heritage study was being conducted, its objectives, what the study hoped to accomplish, and how they could be involved in the planning effort. Ms. Edwards then facilitated each meeting and initiated a dialogue on African-American heritage in the Delta.

### Summary of Workshops

The following was submitted by Ms. Edwards as a summary of the workshops she conducted.

*The written word is the only thing that separates us from the past and oblivion.*  
Merlin the Magician

In 1919 after completing his education at Tuskegee Institute under Booker T. Washington and with only \$2.89, Floyd Brown founded the Fargo Agricultural School in the Arkansas Delta. Brown taught a required weekly 'Class in Common Sense' in which he emphasized the virtues of hard work, service, self-help, pride, thrift, and self determination. No one would disagree with the relevance of Brown's teachings among today's individuals, however, the historical relevance of Brown's teachings, like the myriad other Delta region historical accounts are preserved in isolated communities.

The heritage preservation mandates of the Lower Mississippi Delta Region Heritage Study coupled with the African-American Heritage recommendation workshops have

served as vital facilitation mechanisms to uncover neglected stories like the Fargo Agricultural School, to educate communities about their rich history, to identify technical preservation resource organizations, and to generate ideas for economic development through heritage tourism initiatives.

The motto of the Fargo Agricultural School was “Work Will Win.” Nearly 80 years later as I complete my role within this project, I strengthen my civic convictions from these words and the man. Seeking also to make a positive contribution to history from the wisdom of a Delta resident, humanitarian, female and African-American, I impart the following remarks honed from experiences totaling an excess of thirty years as an artist, educator, administrator, and historic preservationist. It is this professional and personal expertise that guided me to an even deeper level of understanding, inclusion, and diversity throughout the workshops.

Today the Lower Mississippi Delta Region remains a culturally rich timewarp content to remain imbued with inequities and suppression that divided it more than one hundred years ago. The undertakings of the Lower Mississippi Delta Region Heritage Study rekindled hope within individuals that struggle to achieve historical accuracy and stimulate cultural tolerance is still a possibility within their lifetime. Few occasions in the course of history are single events or activities of such paramount importance that they transcend their individual value and in turn shape the direction of history. I believe that the African-American Heritage recommendation workshops of the LMDR has this impact.

The merit and structural expansion of the LMDR study do indeed reflect the sum of its parts, of African-American history. These parts are no greater than the whole of American history nor is American history complete without authentic representation of these parts. This awareness governed the workshops and stimulated inquiry to examine and interpret traditional African-American images.

Questions like “What is preservation?” and “Will this LMDR project be constructed as a present or future mechanism to generate African-American entrepreneurial potential?” were integral to discussion during the workshops. The sites, systems, and stories identified through this heritage study will serve as resource venues equipped with historical preservation networks capable of replenishing themselves and rediscovering African-American history as lost, stolen, or strayed relics of the cradle of civilization.

It is important to remember as you read the following report that the African-American Heritage Workshops represent a microcosm of the LMDR story recovery efforts conducted throughout this project. Four African-American Heritage Recommendation Workshops were conducted in Arkansas (Forrest City), Mississippi (Yazoo City, Jackson), and Tennessee (Memphis). The sites ranged from small city grassroot facilities to large city museum organizations. Participants represented diverse backgrounds and interests, including students, educators, artists, heritage preservation experts and enthusiasts, entrepreneurs, organization directors, historians, storytellers, and museum staff.

Initial contact of workshop participants occurred as a follow-up of prior LMDR public meetings. A referral list was used for initial points of contact for workshop participants, however, participation in the workshops was not limited and were open to the general public. A major goal of the workshops was to increase the contribution from and the percentage of African-American involvement in the LMDR heritage study.

The purpose of these workshops was twofold: (1) to identify additional support stories that make the LMDR a region worthy of national recognition and (2) to place “dots on a map” that represent physical sites where these stories could be preserved and presented. Following the identification of additional stories and recommendations for African-American heritage corridors or trail systems and heritage

corridor and heritage/cultural center, workshop participants discussed management issues of these facilities from a conceptual, specific, and community support perspective.

In June 1996, I participated in the story development symposium component of the LMDR heritage study. From this experience I acquired a sense of the types of stories that exist in the Delta. Subsequently I created the following broad group areas for discussion at the African-American workshops. Time limitations of the workshop governed how I selected the broad topic areas found in this report. I felt that they would not receive attention unless they were grouped. The groupings also highlight the gaps within stories not addressed or under-addressed. One of the major story voids is the length of the timeline — what time period should the heritage study address for African-American history in the Delta? Topics that need further exploration also include government institutions, prison systems, medical/ health institutions, all fields of athletics, varied business organizations, maternal/fraternal groups, children, and women.

The successful dialogue and meaningful contributions of the workshop participants reinforce the cultural reality that a large part of the history of African-American communities remains predominantly oral traditions and are reflected in the following combined resource structure areas:

Religion and education are grouped together to stress the important symbiosis between them.

Economic power is thought to only be achieved through Political Empowerment, thus the combination of these groups.

Art and culture highlight the immeasurable success and financial equity achieved by African-Americans in these fields.

More research and exploration of environmental stories told by African-

Americans surrounding the land as an influencing force, transportation or flood issues of the Mississippi River and its effect on the lives of Delta residents needs to be initiated or continued. The “Names List” attached to this document establishes the importance of identifying individuals important to African-American Heritage in the Delta. References included here identify information collected for the workshop discussion and should be considered only an introduction to the resources/books/literature available for understanding African-American lives in the Delta.

## RELIGION/EDUCATION

This grouping speaks to the vital relationship between religion and education in African-American communities in the Delta. From their role as first educators of an enslaved people to their leadership role during modern-day civil rights struggles, black churches and historically black colleges and universities have been integral to supporting, leading, and encouraging the Delta’s African-American communities.

The following are stories related to the religion/education topic discussed at the workshops:

- Role of Oral History in African-American history
- Terminology used to identify race and/or ethnic origin in the Delta: African-American, Afro-American, blacks, negro, colored, and nigger
- Slavery, the Civil War, and racism in the lives of African-Americans from the perspective of victimization or empowerment
- Tell the story of repeated projects that are about and for African-Americans but fail to have valid and authentic inclusion of African-Americans

- Sacred music, blues, and spirituals
- State universities' treatment of athletes (football) and the confederate flag at Ole Miss
- Robert Evans, coach at Ole Miss
- Strong role of black churches within the black community — “cradle role” for babies in older churches
- Architecture of black churches, who designed and built them
- Churches that have been burned (continues today) and have been rebuilt reflect the spirit of survival and dedication in African-American communities — Mt. Vernon church rebuilt on Canal St., Yazoo City, MS
- National Baptist Convention — 1954; progressive convention held in Greenville, MS
- The use of the Bible as one of the first books many black people learned to read (post reconstruction)
- The life and times of L. G. Jordan
- Churches, schools, teachers, and desegregation
- Major Holmes Jr. College
- Oaks Academy
- One-room classrooms established in churches (funding needed to restore classroom house in Yazoo City)
- African-American newspapers
- 1868 Mount Helems Church, Jackson, Mississippi
- Magnolia Cemetery (Helena, Arkansas) and other cemetery sites

## BUSINESS/POLITICS

Economic power is thought to only be achieved through political empowerment. This grouping outlines both the political and economic struggles and successes of African-American communities in the Delta.

The following stories were discussed at the workshops in relation to Business and Politics in the Delta:

- Role racism plays in diverting industry away from the black community
- 1930–40' black business district with barber shops, restaurant, dry cleaners, and 13 black- owned banks in Yazoo City
- The Afro-American Sons and Daughters Organization (Yazoo City)
- All African-Americans did not live on plantations during the slavery period; need to explore role of free blacks and their occupations; black brick makers
- The tradition of black soldiers in the Civil War — Battle of Benton, Mississippi
- Rebel flags
- First African-American senator from Louisiana
- Civil Rights struggle from slavery to present day
- Colored/White Only signs — Drink the Colored Water not the Cold Water
- Black Mayors' Conference
- Black sharecroppers and migration patterns
- Black farmers' loss of farmland because of racism
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## ART/CULTURE

- This grouping highlights the immeasurable success, recognition, and financial equity achieved by African-Americans in these arenas.
- The following stories were discussed at the workshops in relation to art and culture in the Delta African-American communities:
- Redo the blues that only portray the traditionally recognized artists — include others as well as young blues players of today
- Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series (Artist)
- Hale Woodruff (Artist)
- Dewitt Jordan (Artist)
- George Hunt (Artist)
- The Oaks African-American Cultural Center has a blues room
- Spiritual/gospel music (The Blind Boys of Mississippi and others)
- Heritage festivals
- 1996 Heritage Festival, Mound Bayou, Mississippi
- Blues and Heritage Festival, Greenville, Mississippi
- Beale Street artistic community, Memphis, Tennessee
- Organized crime within the music industry
- King Biscuit Blues Festival, Helena, Arkansas
- Folk music
- Folkart — quilting

## ENVIRONMENT

This topic, the environment and its effect on the lives of African-Americans in the Delta, was under-addressed during the workshops. The stories of black landowners and farmers as well as those who lived on or near or made their livelihoods from the Mississippi River system need to be identified in more detail. Efforts to research this topic will help visitors understand all aspects of African-American life in the Delta.

The following stories were discussed briefly in relation to the environment of the Delta and its impact on African-Americans' lives in the Delta:

- The Mississippi River, Yazoo River, Arkansas River, St. Francis River, White River
- Farming, fishing
- Landownership by African-Americans in the Delta

## NAMES LIST

The following list reflects the names of those individuals considered important to African-American heritage in Delta, as discussed at the workshops.

- Dr. David Mathews (minister)
- Richard Wright (author, attended Smith Robertson School, Jackson, Mississippi)
- L.T. Miller (physician)
- Medgar Evers (civil rights activist) - his work and home, Jackson, Mississippi
- Daisy Bates (civil rights activist)
- Ida B. Wells (author, civil rights activist)

- Charles D. Bannerman (community activist, Greenville, Mississippi)
- Smith Roberston (politician)
- William Johnson (entrepreneur)
- Jack Hunt (cowboy white cousin of an African-American)
- Robert Johnson (blues artist)
- Ruffus Thomas (musician)
- Floyd Brown (educator)
- E.C. Morris (minister)
- Scott Bond (entrepreneur)
- John Howard (artist)
- Delta Blues Museum (Clarksdale, Mississippi)
- William Johnson House (Natchez, Mississippi)
- Utica, Mississippi
- Jacqueline House Museum (Vicksburg, Mississippi)
- Pinney Woods, Farish Street Historic District, Tougaloo College, Mansion House, Old State Capital (Jackson, Mississippi)
- Jackson State University, Ayer Hall (women's dorm, site of 1970 civil rights shooting)
- Battlegrounds, old slave house used for breeding slaves (Cairo, Illinois)

## RECOMMENDATIONS — SITES/ RESOURCES

- Select sites from all traditional land grant African-American educational institutions
- Plantations in Mississippi, including existing stories that authenticate treatment of slaves and the reality of slavery
- Use historical journals as resource material to identify existing stories
- The Oaks African-American Cultural Center (Yazoo City, Mississippi)
- Triangle Cultural Center (Yazoo City, Mississippi)
- Downtown historic district rebuilt in 1905 (Yazoo City, Mississippi)
- One room schoolhouse in church at Yazoo City, Mississippi (needs to be restored)
- Mound Bayou as a total historic community (Mound Bayou, Mississippi)
- Hatison Festival (represents a Juneteenth festival), Illinois
- The trail of the Underground Railroad
- African-American Museum (Chattanooga, Tennessee)
- Elmwood Cemetery established in 1852 (Memphis, Tennessee)
- National Civil Rights Museum (Memphis, Tennessee)
- Beale Street Historic District
- W. C. Handy Home, Handy Park (Memphis, Tennessee)
- Church Park, Burkle Estate, Mason Temple, Gay Hawk Restaurant and Bar (Memphis, Tennessee)
- Tri-State Defender newspaper, Stax Records, Historic Markers (Memphis, Tennessee)

- Lemoyne-Owen College, Historic Memphis Black High Schools — Melrose, Booker T. Washington, Manassas, Washington Carver, Northside and Frederick Douglas (Memphis, Tennessee)
- Alex Haley House and Museum (Henning, Tennessee)
- Gravesite of Blues legend “Sleepy John” Estes (Brownsville, Tennessee)
- Lane College (Jackson, Tennessee)
- Fargo Agricultural School Museum (Brinkley, Arkansas)
- Centennial Missionary Baptist Church, New Light Baptist Church (Helena, Arkansas)
- Madison, Arkansas
- Isaac Hathaway Art Center at the University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff (the old A&M Teacher’s College) (Pine Bluff, Arkansas)
- Boys, Girls, Adult Community Development Center (BGACDC in Marvel, Arkansas)
- Shotgun houses (Clarendon, Arkansas)
- Form an advisory council to manage design studies and ensure equity in contracting services involved in the implementation of projects.
- Revisit all existing historical documentation/ interpretations of African-American history
- Structure the utilization of existing books written by African-American as the initial resource reference materials to collect stories within LMDR
- Develop greater involvement and partnerships with black scholars/academic communities
- Explore the possibility of merging museums and libraries to study past documents and history of African-Americans
- Develop opportunities for African-American organizations to conduct symposiums for ongoing development to uncover African-American contributions within American history
- Establish community funding resource centers to address preservation training and resource development
- Fund research projects to develop additional untold or under-told stories of African-American individuals.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS — ACTIONS**

- Over a 10-year period conduct five LMDR African-American Historic Preservation Conferences, each one at a different site and focusing on different topics. Utilize active partnerships that focus on issues of networking, empowerment, management, research, education outreach, and preservation training.
- Issue a “Call for Papers” for the 1999 LMDR Conference on African American preservation issues
- Create a network of people interested in African-American heritage
- Develop oral history programs for all sites